REMARKS

Claims 1-3, 5-9 and 11-19 are pending in the Application. Claims 1 and 11 are currently amended. Claims 4 and 10 are canceled. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and reexamination of the pending claims.

Claims 11-13 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Caveney et al. (USPN 5,765,983). Claims 1, 10 and 14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Caveney et al. in view of Gordon et al. Claims 5-7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Caveney et al. in view of Gordon et al. and Beaulieu et al. Claim 8 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Caveney et al. in view of Gordon et al. and Moore. Claims 15 and 16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Caveney et al. in view of Beaulieu et al. Claim 17 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Caveney et al. in view of Moore. Applicant respectfully overcomes the rejections as follows.

Claim 1 sets forth a method including "extending a semiconductor wafer transport device from said transport module, allowing said wafer transport device to be exposed to the ambient environment outside of said processing system prior to entering into an adjacently positioned Front Opening Unified Pod (FOUP)."

As claimed, the FOUP is a separate component from the processing system and remains a separate component from the processing system while a transport device or robot is passed between the FOUP and processing system. Because the FOUP is separate from the processing system the wafer transport device becomes exposed to the ambient environment outside of the processing system "prior to entering" into the FOUP. This occurs since the FOUP is not mounted onto the processing system and no seal is created between the FOUP and the processing system.

Applicant could find no teaching or suggestion in Caveney et al. that discloses a processing system and a FOUP or other container that are uncoupled such that when the transport device exits the transport module, the transport device is exposed to the ambient environment (e.g. the clean room environment) before entering into the FOUP or other container. As shown in FIG. 1, the cassette elevator 38 is

As the Examiner points out "Gordon et al. teach a FOUP (22) and a docking device (20) that is made to be mounted on a semiconductor processing system." (Id.) Gordon et al. discloses that the "FOUP 22 abuts with and seals against the bulkhead 24" (Gordon et al.,

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col. 4, lines 63-64) and that the "bulkhead 24 [] mates with and seals to semiconductor processing equipment...." (Gordon et al. col. 4, lines 42-43)

Gordon et al. discloses that the FOUP and semiconductor processing equipment are to be mated together during operation of the processing system, and thus while a transport device is passed therebetween. In contrast, Claim 1 set forth that the processing system and FOUP are to remain separate components while extending a transport device therebetween thus allowing the wafer transport device to become exposed to the ambient environment outside of the processing system. Accordingly, since Gordon et al. discloses mounting a FOUP to semiconductor processing equipment, the combination of Caveney et al. and Gordon et al. do not arrive at Applicant's Claim 1. Thus, Claim 1 is allowable over Caveney et al. alone and in view of Gordon et al.

Claim 11 sets forth a system including a "wafer transport device configured to extend out from said transport module to become exposed to an ambient environment outside of said processing system and said container, before entering said container."

Applicant could find no teaching or suggestion in Caveney et al. that discloses that the transport device is configured to extend out from the transport module and be exposed to the ambient environment outside of the processing system and container, before the transport device enters the container.

In contrast, FIG. 1 of Caveney et al. clearly shows that the external cassette elevator 38 is mounted to load lock chamber 22, with no space therebetween. Accordingly, Claim 11 is allowable over Caveney et al.

Claims 2-3 and 5-9 depend from Claim 1 and are therefore allowable for at least the same reasons as Claim 1. Claims 12-19 depend from Claim 11 and are therefore allowable for at least the same reasons as Claim 11.

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CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, pending Claims 1-3, 5-9 and 11-19 are now in condition for allowance and allowance of the application is hereby solicited. If the Examiner has any questions or concerns, the Examiner is hereby requested to telephone Applicant's Attorney at (949) 752-7040.

Certification of Facsimile Transmission

I hereby certify that this paper is being facsimile transmitted to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on the date shown below.

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November 10, 2003

Respectfully submitted,

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